

SOURCE



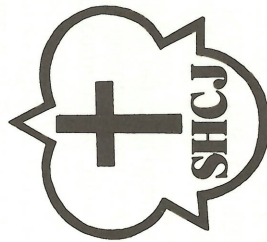
STUDIES AND REFLECTIONS
ON THE HERITAGE OF THE
SOCIETY OF THE HOLY CHILD JESUS

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GOVERNMENT



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EDITORIAL

THE editorial board were encouraged that so many people enjoyed the last issue of SOURCE. Our hope is that SOURCE will facilitate the interchange of ideas across the provinces and so we would like to develop a section for responses to articles which have been published. We welcome any contributions or comments.

This issue is devoted to a discussion of GOVERNMENT in response to a mandate from the last General Chapter (Chapter Enactments p16) and we wish to express our thanks to the contributors. Margaret Loran's article facing the question of what we understand by government is followed by shorter, more specific reflections from Frances Wheeler and Monica Matthews. The challenge to make room for the prophetic through our style of government is taken up by Anne Bryson, and further commented upon by Mary Lalor and Eileen McDevitt. Finally Mary Mills discusses our approach to obedience and Sally Cassidy and Eileen Sweeney offer personal observations on the same topic.

The fact that this issue is slightly behind schedule reflects some difficulty we had in finding contributors. Perhaps this is an issue the Society is reluctant to address? We must apologise for the absence of contributions from West Africa — there was some breakdown in communication between the editorial board and the province. However, we intend to redress the balance in the next issue which will be devoted entirely to SHCJ IN AFRICA. Anyone wishing to submit contributions should send copy to the editor by March.

JUDITH LANCASTER SHCJ

WHAT IS SHCJ GOVERNMENT?

Margaret Loran SHCJ

THE title of this article is couched in question form, 'What is SHCJ Government?' Let me say right from the beginning that I do not have the answer. My reading, reflecting and praying on the subject in preparation for writing leads me to believe rather that there are several answers, or possibly that SHCJ Government itself is so multi-faceted that if one answer exists it must contain within itself several aspects. There was, however, no agreement that I would come up with any conclusions; so what I am proposing to do is to pose a few further questions with some of my reasons for thinking along these lines. I hope that these will stimulate thought, criticism, further reflection and ideas which can then be exchanged in any forum but maybe, in particular, in the pages of future editions of SOURCE.

It seems to me that we use the word 'government' most frequently in one of three broad senses. In an 'in-Society' use it often refers to the actual people occupied in the ministry of government and, most specifically, when they are carrying out that ministry. So the second sense in which we use it can refer explicitly to their activities and decisions, but in wider terms it also includes all the many ways and processes by which the life of the Society and of all its members is fostered, organised and directed. Thirdly, and maybe less consciously, we sometimes use government to put a name on the philosophy, the spirituality and what Gerald Arbuckle calls the 'culture' of the Society which underlies everything comprising the second sense.

We have many structures of government in the Society — all those arrangements we make to maintain our unity and to promote our mission. Some, such as provincial and general councils, area/local superiors, chapters, will immediately come to mind. Then we can include groups which meet regularly: commissions; formation teams; extended general council; extended provincial councils and so on. It could be said that every province meeting,

working party, task force, community/area meeting is also a structure of government. As I visualised these all taking place I realised that for the purposes of this article I have come to think of government as a kind of life-force, an essential element of the Society's life, and extending far beyond the actions and responsibilities of those in the ministry of government.

In a talk given at Suffern in 1970, Sr Mary Anthony Weinig, speaking of '*Spiritual Governance in the SHCJ*', said 'Its scope is as large as the entire working out of an individual's vocation in the Society'. I would like to add 'and the Society's vocation in the world', since we know that God's will is not a plan which remains on some eternally set 'automatic pilot', but is rather revealed to us as we search for it together. Government is all that the Society has provided itself with to keep itself focused, and facing in that one direction. But this article will not be concerned with the practical ramifications of that so much as with the essence, and will suggest a few approaches to try to come to what is at the 'heart of SHCJ government'.

Since this article does not claim or even attempt to be exhaustive, it will contain many gaps and leave important things unsaid. But I offer this as one person's attempt to go beyond definition to try to touch on the meaning, the deeper significance of that often-mundane element of our SHCJ lives that we call 'government'. In a conversation about the subject of this article some months ago I expressed my concern that I didn't really know anything about it. The response from one of my friends was that we must know what government is since we are always talking about it. Further reflection, however, has only confirmed my impression that the fact that we talk a lot about Society government no more means that we know its full significance than our frequent talk about God signifies that we have plumbed the depth of that mystery, which brings me to my first question:

Is SHCJ government a mystery?

That question seems calculated to provoke at least a laugh, if not something worse! And yet, at the risk of raising a few laughs, I feel there is a sense in which Government is a profound mystery, part of the mystery of God among us; that in the bonds it establishes and the lines of communication it involves, there is God. Mystery is simultaneously fascinating and frightening and sometimes the fear it evokes can result in human efforts to reduce its power by exercising control over it. Another rather discouraging factor in the face of mystery is the sheer dedication of spirit called for by the attempt to hold any sense of life-as-mystery in tension with the everyday practicalities of our lives. It can seem daunting indeed. But if we, like our 'foremothers', listen to Cornelia then we will, I suspect, be encouraged. In her book '*The Spirituality of Cornelia Connelly*', Caritas McCarthy tells us that in both her constitutional texts and her Epiphany letters Cornelia encouraged the Sisters 'to full contemplative involvement in the mystery of the Incarnation, into which their vows have specially drawn them'.¹ Surrounded as she was by innumerable practical demands on her attention Cornelia nevertheless lived an intense interior life herself and called her sisters to do likewise.²

Is SHCJ government self-government?

A sentence in the *Informatio* suggests an answer to this question. We read, 'Danell's rule (1874) checks the authority of the superior general and puts great emphasis on the machinery of government and the obligations of the vows.'³ His rule was just that — his and not ours — but since the approbation in 1887 the government of the Society has been by the Society and subject only to the same outside regulations as any other canonically approved congregation. So in that sense SHCJ government is self-government: but can we understand the question with a more individualised application?

As inheritors of Cornelia's special charisma and her total dedication to doing God's will ('the only happiness. . .') we must surely direct all our government towards this end of ascertaining as far as we can what God's will is and then doing it. Nowadays many of us might not want to use the words 'God's will', preferring instead more dynamic expressions such as: 'listening to what God is saying to us in our experience'; 'discerning where God is in our lives'; 'where the Spirit is leading us'. Whichever words are used the attitude is one of discernment. And this discernment, both 'formal' eg when a significant decision has to be made, and 'informal' in an on-going attuning of the human spirit to the Holy Spirit, is undertaken by both individuals and groups.⁴ So it may be legitimate to say that in the Society's life whenever an individual, a community, working-party, council etc is discerning then government is going on. We are accustomed to thinking of government in relation to an individual member of the Society especially at 'big' moments such as a time of change of ministry: we do not, I think, normally connect it with her constant discerning stance with regard to her whole life. But I wonder if we cannot make this link and say that this is indeed government — not all there is to government, and not, obviously, in the formal, structured sense but still government — because she is opening herself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is directing the Society through the openness and obedience of each of us to what we hear. Maybe part of the mystery of government is that it is being 'done' to us even as we 'do' it. If this is so then my suggestion is that whatever the locus of this discerning, be it an individual in retreat, a community reflecting on its experience of ministry, a province evaluating the year's implementation of the Justice with Compassion focus, this is the Society governing itself and this is SHCJ government.

The people in the ministry of government have been asked by the Society to undertake, for a time, specific responsibilities in this process. They each have their appropriate roles — even government at the centre must do something! But what they are doing, essential as it is to the Society's existence, is not the sum total of its government. Perhaps 'self-government' is not an accurate term for what I am struggling to describe here, but it focuses attention away from the machinery of government and on to individual sharing and participation in that life-force mentioned earlier.

When I began to think about this subject we were all in the early stages of the process of surfacing names for provincial government. As I write, the process is well under way in all three provinces, and by the time 'SOURCE' is published it will be at or near an end. So our attention recently has been on the

'who' of government. Without in any way wishing to minimise the importance of our doing everything in our power in this respect, I have a growing conviction that the quality of government in the Society is less dependent on who are the people 'in government' (as we say) than on how much each of us is in God's government, ie involved in and incorporated into the governing of the whole Society through attention to the spirit. If this is the way the Society governs itself, with the stress on the life of the spirit, then we see even more clearly how Bp. Danell's rule, with its great emphasis on the *machinery* of government, stands in sharp contrast to SHCJ government.

Is SHCJ government bonded-self-government?

Lest in that last section I seem to have over-stressed the individual aspect even to the point of diminishing the need for the structures and ministers of government (and so doing myself out of a job!), let me at once state my belief that these are so necessary that without them the Society would not exist. At the root of the healthy life of an apostolic group is the question 'Where are we going?', and, while not an end in itself, government (in the technical, traditional sense) is integral to our being able to answer that question as a group. The 'cor unum et anima una' among us, so desired by Cornelia, is for mission and it is by the exercise of government that the relationship for union in the Society is established and maintained. So government as usually understood is like the cement holding the individual bricks together in one whole entity.

Because the Society's government is by women and for women, and given Cornelia's experience, our traditions and our fewness in number, it is hardly surprising that personal relationships are seen as significant for its functioning. While it is generally recognised nowadays that 'full human development requires movement away from conformity and pre-determined role expectations and towards greater autonomy' this is only part of the story as women especially know: 'women's experience convinces them that maturity must include not only autonomy but also relationship, not only independence but also belonging'.⁵

Understood then as the relational bond of union in the Society and as a means of continuing incorporation (belonging) of all its members into the apostolic life of the Society, can SHCJ government be a means of promoting a feminine perspective on life? I think there is a case for saying it can. The more inclusive the view of who is involved in government within the Society, and the wider the understanding of where it is happening, the more relationship-oriented the mind-set. On the other hand, to limit the notion of government to the actions of those in positions of responsibility in the ministry of government by use of language, attitudes and behaviour is to reinforce a hierarchical, pyramid-like model of our Society. This has the unfortunate effect of making it a mere reflection of the inherited, conditioned view of western society which many women are now consciously resisting, expressing as it does a culture that pre-supposes winners and losers, over-stressed individualism, power, domination and oppression, all of which run counter to our expressed desire to work for justice, compassion, collaboration, sharing and bondedness.⁶

Is SHCJ government a sacrament?

We know that the concept of sacrament is not confined to the seven official sacraments of the Church. In this final section I would like to apply it to my topic and see if the conjunction of 'sacrament' and 'government' sheds any light on the question of what government is.

One of the most helpful things I ever read about the idea of sacrament was a single sentence, no doubt set in a larger context, which I can no longer remember, nor can I remember who wrote it. Neither can I quote the sentence with any accuracy but the idea has stayed with me and it is that a sacrament is a visible, tangible sign of something that is always true. Thus the sign itself limited, contingent and culturally-conditioned as it is, not only reminds us of the particular truth it points to but also inserts us into the life it communicates. For instance, it is true — we believe — that our God is a loving God, 'slow to anger and rich in mercy' (Ps102). In the parable of the lost son in Luke 15:11-32 Jesus depicts for us this loving God on the look-out for the returning child, surely in order to show the son that he is forgiven. In other words the father's forgiving love precedes the son's return which is needed only so what is 'always true' — the forgiving love of the parent — can be expressed, but not so that it can exist. So from this story we learn that God is ALWAYS forgiving us, and we therefore are ALWAYS forgiven, not only when we receive the sacrament of reconciliation. But the sacrament is a significant reminder of this truth and also a privileged moment when the truth takes on a new reality in our life and relationship with God.

On this view, then, a sacrament is a moment of life-giving entry into the mystery that God is. It is a mystery we sense, but we also know the impossibility of living continually at that depth, that intensity of heightened awareness with which we are occasionally blessed. All 'sacraments', as points of deeper insertion into this mystery, recall us in their different ways to an aspect of the abiding truth about God and God's close relationship with us. And the aspect of this relationship especially close to the heart of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, as it was to Cornelia, is that God (is)-with-us (Emmanuel) through the Incarnation.

God was from the beginning present in Jesus, and in his gospel Luke, especially, presents Jesus as filled with and led by the Spirit of God. Indeed, the first two chapters of Luke, which together with Matthew 1 & 2 form the scriptural source of much of the Society's spirit, abound with references to the Holy Spirit who fills the hearts, not only of Jesus, but also of those involved in the events surrounding His coming into the world. So this truth about God's relationship with us, expressed in our faith and trust in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, holds particular significance for SHCJ. Given, however, our human inability to be always in touch with the full mystery of God's presence among us, I wonder if 'Government' — and by this I mean all manifestations of it, from apparently minor details to events of obvious major significance like a general chapter — is not a gift, a sacrament for us. Is it, like the seven Sacraments, a sign, a repeated reminder of the something greater than itself which gives it meaning; something which is always true even while being

limited, contingent and culturally conditioned in its expression? On those occasions when we are conscious of being involved in the government of our Society, whether it be by discerning with the provincial, attending a Society meeting, reading a Society letter, is it possible to recognise an invitation to enter even more deeply into the mystery of God's presence with us in the Holy Spirit 'from whom all good comes'? (CC) Can 'government' recall to our minds, and put flesh on, our inherited belief that the Society is God's work and not ours alone?

'The Society of the Holy Child Jesus is not my work,
I have only followed the inspiration of God in obedience
to HIS not MY will.' CC (Buckle D63.27)

What is SHCJ government?

This may all seem very idealistic and removed from government as we experience it, but as I said initially, it was never intended that our current practice would be the concern of this article. Rather it is an attempt to delve beneath the surface of government-in-practice to the essence, the life which is not limited by finite realities such as time, contemporaneity and personalities. It is tentative and incomplete, this I know, and there remain plenty of other things to be said and approaches to be taken. For instance at one stage I was entertaining the idea of working through a series of images of government such as concentric circles, a spider's web, a fountain, an onion(!), a steering wheel. No doubt other and better images will spring to other minds, each providing an insight into this mystery. And other questions will need to be asked, such as 'how is SHCJ government related to the Kingdom?' But that would be another whole article in itself.

NOTES

- 1 'The Spirituality of Cornelia Connelly' Caritas McCarthy SHCJ pg. 124.
- 2 cf. op. cit. pg. 124.
- 3 'Positio: Informatio For The Canonization Process of the Servant of God Cornelia Connelly' pg. 83.
- 4 cf. Constitutions Parag. 34.
- 5 'Women's Spirituality — Resources for Christian Development' Ed. Joan Wolski Comm. pg. 3.
- 6 cf. A paper entitled 'Interactive phases of curricular revision — a feminist perspective' Peggy McIntosh, Wellesley College Center for research on women, Wellesley MA 02181 U.S.A.

NEW PATCH — OLD GARMENT

Frances Wheeler SHCJ

JESUS tells us in Matthew's gospel (9:16) that 'no one puts a piece of un-shrunken cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment and a worse tear is made' if this is done. He gives us a clear principle which can be applied to a number of situations of a practical or spiritual nature. Before making applications in the realm of Society government, I would like to take a closer look at the miniscule parable with which Jesus presents us.

First of all, when does one patch a garment? When it is old, somewhat worn but still wearable. Why does one patch? For one or more reasons: presumably the garment is still seen to have some wear left in it; maybe it is a favourite garment to which the wearer cannot bear to say goodbye. How does the patch affect the garment? It prolongs its life, it gives it new life. While at first the patch may be a very obvious addition, in time, with wear and tear, it will become very much part of the garment. How does one patch? First, as Jesus tells us, by shrinking the new material; in this way it will be 'sympathetic' to the old material of which it will become, in time, an integral part. One must choose material that is the same as, very like or, perhaps, in marked contrast in colour and pattern, to the original material of the garment. If the material is the same, it is important to fit together the pattern of both the garment and the patch. The process of shrinking the new material involves a measure of testing, for the degree of shrinkage must be just right for the weave of the garment.

Given that any analogy limps, what application of this parable can we make to SHCJ government? Do the 'old garment' and the 'new patch' speak to us at all in this connection? They suggest some lines of thought to me which I will share.

First, I write as one who has been a member of the Society for forty years, that is, for twenty years in a pre-Vatican II Society and for twenty years in a post-Vatican II one. So I have worn the unpatched and the patched garment! In the era of the patch I have had experience in government at local, provincial and general levels. During the era of the unpatched garment I lived, as did we all, under the Constitutions and Rule drawn up by Cornelia, the fruit of her loving labours and care.

so that we may be who we are and who we are becoming, image for us a style of leadership and put forth an agenda for government that speaks of God working through a North American apostolic community of women. Government should preside for us at the table where we gather in unity, peace and justice and from which we leave to preside ourselves at other tables. I suggest to you that good government acts in much the same way as does good liturgy; good leaders act in much the same way as do good presiders.

All life is on a sacramental spectrum. Liturgy points to this reality in our midst. Good liturgy is the event where our desires gain a public presence; our values are expressed, reinforced, intensified and transformed through rituals and ceremonies; our individual views are challenged by the common vision, our disparate concerns search out a common ground for dialogue and action. It is where we celebrate the particularity of God's revelation in us and open ourselves to a vision of this revelation in the particularities of other human experiences; where we finally see that nothing is outside of God, where human endeavor is lifted to divine activity and even where we do not see it now, we reimage it as God would have it and we go forth.

A presider at liturgy does not make things happen; liturgy does not make things happen. Only the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ, present in and through and with us makes Godly things happen; but liturgy highlights and focuses our attention on that action. Government should act as a continual liturgical event in our lives.

SHCJ OBEDIENCE TODAY

Mary E. Mills SHCJ

IN what I am going to say I express one line of personal thought on the subject of obedience as we may view it today. I am primarily concerned not with the details of structures and systems of human government procedures but with the inner dimension of life which these outer layers contain. I want to consider the roots of our obedience as SHCJ within the context of Church and Membership and to see where that consideration can take us.

'We glorify God in doing his will as he manifests it to us through our confessor and our superiors and according to the events of life which he orders or permits.' (CC 22:18); so wrote Cornelia on the subject of obedience. As a channel for the virtue of humility obedience was close to her heart. In our modern constitutions we share the same view of the centrality of obedience when we say 'To share fully in the mission of Christ we must enter into the mystery of his obedience.' (para 34).

But how do we interpret these core statements in our present-day environment? For unless we give some shape to the ideal we may not see clearly how to move forward. We can, perhaps, pick up the phrase 'mission of Christ' as our starting point here. We are all called to work for God's kingdom through the agency of Jesus Christ. Whatever we may make of it, then, our widest obedience is to the institutional church. When we make our vows we do so publicly, among a congregation of Christians who witness to our personal and total commitment to the needs and life of the Christian community. This sense of belonging to the visible church led Cornelia to acquiesce in the patriarchal authority of Bishops in her own day. Even when disagreeing with a Bishop's opinion she was prepared to defer to his views in many areas of life, for those with priestly authority in the Christian community had to be obeyed. We may look at this commitment to the institutional church in another light today. When we make our vows publicly the format of the liturgy used is very similar to that of those being admitted to priesthood. Both services involve a public interrogation to reveal the candidate's true purpose and a public promise of total commitment to serving the community. The ministry of priesthood, then, is not wholly separate in its initiation from the ministry of religious life. Our belonging to the institutional church is also a call to ministry and to the pastoral care of all God's people. This basic pastoral ministry we then work out in our different apostolates and lifestyles.

In this way we are reminded of the ancient description of Christians as modelled upon Christ who was himself priest, prophet and king; we are a holy nation and a royal priesthood. This identity is conferred on the Christian in the sacrament of baptism and affirmed in the sacrament of confirmation. St Paul's letters describe how the reception of baptism brings the person into Christ and

bestows on her the gift of God's spirit through Jesus Christ. It is this Spirit which will make our further commitment to pastoral ministry effective in daily life. Paul reminds us that it is because we are called into Christ that we live a moral life of charity and service. In order to realise our basic commitment to the church, then, we must first be obedient to the movement of God's spirit in ourselves.

Here we can reflect on our Ignatian heritage. Ignatius Loyola approved of living first and then reflecting on that life-setting. The real life experience comes first but we can, and should, stop to consider what has been happening in order to discern the movement of God's spirit in our own lives. This fits well with Cornelia's practicality. Our charism is towards an Incarnated Divinity; we find God in the Jesus of Nazareth, of Galilee and of Jerusalem. In our own lives we find God in the events of life and can offer prayer and worship to him as we 'walk the muddy streets' and 'labour' for his people (to echo Cornelia's language).

This concern with the practical and the real leads on to the individual and personal, for only the sister concerned can truly assess what has been happening to her and how she feels herself reacting. Obedience requires each person's wholehearted inner faithfulness to the process of seeking for and following the spirit. This sense of obedience to the truth of who one is and is to become is reflected in Cornelia's advice about novices, 'All ought to form themselves according to their vocation and thence to the spirit of the Society' (CC LIV:85). No one can remove this personal freedom and responsibility from the individual; and the strength and vitality of the group springs from each one's taking this up seriously with regard to herself. None of the other aspects of obedience is more fundamental than this: neither people nor institutions nor policies nor structures. We are each called to help provide the freedom and supportive environment that is necessary for others to be able to choose God's path for themselves.

So we are firstly individuals before God but we are also a group with a common charism and common aims. Within the group we have a system of accountability. As Christians we have ultimately and always to account for ourselves to God. As SHCJ we have to account for ourselves to those traditionally called our superiors — i.e., to those to whom the Society has, for the time being, given the job of promoting individual growth by approximation to a common standard. This common standard is manifest in the scriptures, in our constitutions, in our community life and decisions.

We can view the task of superior as being like that of educator or retreat director in the sense that it involves 'walking alongside' the persons concerned. Whether at local, provincial or general level the task is to facilitate the individual discernments of members of the Society and the way in which these individual choices affect the life of the group as a whole. We may see general government as facilitating through the office of highest legal authority in the Society and through the linking of members with global issues and through making links between separate provinces within the wider whole. The provincial superior may exercise the facilitating role through drawing sisters in her area to reflect on their individual apostolates and lifestyles while also

linking local communities in that area. The local superior also facilitates individual growth and links members of a small group to one another.

In each case it is the individual who is the source of movement. It is she who relates to the facilitating superior. Indeed the role of facilitator is just as much one of personal reflection and discernment of the movement of God's spirit in events as is the individual sister's. Hence obedience to superiors is not blanket passivity in the face of greater knowledge or understanding but rather a willingness to share the activity of discerning with someone else. This idea of dialogue between authority and individuals is very much at the centre of the concept of collegiality in our time. Decisions have to be made which affect our lives and futures but they come as a result of a two-way communication between sister and superior.

Such a two-way process lies also at the heart of consensus within a group. Here it is the individuals who by interrelating form a common policy or lifestyle. A group can, in this way, facilitate both its members and its corporate life.

What is at stake is the effective fulfilment in daily life of that commitment to ministry made at the start of a religious life. Each sister makes such a commitment and each has the task of making it real in all the stages of life. A structure of obedience to superiors is, indeed, a tool for helping on that progress in ministry which is at the heart of each one's call. There is a need, then, for individuals to be open to those who, at any time, are given the task of superior, but there is a prior need for an active and involved stance on the part of these same individuals. Each sister needs enthusiasm, courage and perseverance for her own life-ministry.

From that strong foundation she can open out her own discernment to the companionship of others in her life. Each one of us takes ultimate responsibility for her own vocation and for its practical fulfilment in each stage of life. To do this effectively we may need the advice and support of other people. A superior is someone who can be brought into the process of exploring the movement of God's spirit insofar as the individual wishes to share and to seek advice. Such a superior is not a spiritual director but more a companion in life with whom we can check out our decisions and opinions about our ministry as it is experienced in apostolates and lifestyle.

For her part a superior may wish to draw attention to issues in our world or in our street to which we as individuals have not given much consideration. This is a means of enabling individual growth in commitment by providing a supportive environment. What is supported here is the individual's capacity for wise discernment. Not that a superior imposes any particular attitude or approach but rather that she makes a plurality of material available to the individual sister for her own responsible evaluation of relevant issues.

For those to whom the job of superior is from time to time given are also individuals in the same ultimate position of personal choice and responsibility for their lives and ministry. For them the task of superior is discerned as the appropriate expression of their individual ministry in this period of time.

Everything turns, eventually, on the uniqueness of this individual choice and responsibility, but at the heart of that individualism there is a paradox for

we were not called into Christ to be on our own but to be part of the corporate Christ, the community who live by his Name. Whether we interpret this community dimension as visible church, as world, as local group, we encounter the same need to find a harmony with our sisters and brothers. The role of superior can be described as facilitating that group dimension of our living. By reminding or informing the individual of aspects of real life the superior links the individual to the wider scene and also promotes further growth in the individual herself.

What I have been discussing is not the precise legal or administrative dimensions of superior but rather the inner purpose of this role. This inner dimension will be fleshed out in different ways at different times, as noted with regard to Cornelia and ourselves earlier on. But in order that the precise details of a 'superior's job' may be appropriately designed we must first take inner structures seriously. What I have been saying is that the inner dynamism of superior and of obedience comes from the individual's commitment to the community of Christ and initially and fundamentally to the spirit of God. If we keep this in mind we shall devise practical structures in government which are growthful and enable each sister to fulfil her initial commitment.

To summarise, then, what we need to consider first of all is the term Ministry. This term conveys our basic identity within the church for it shows us to be called to share a pastoral concern for the Christian group in our area, in our world. Ministry is made a living reality by the operation of God's spirit in the individual Christian. This spirit has to be looked for and its path followed. We can best do this by reflecting on our life and our world as we have recently experienced them. It is the privilege and the real responsibility of each sister to work continually at this inner discernment. By doing so we shall come to know God and God's plans and to cooperate with them — an event which the scriptures hold out to us as the highest form of religious existence. Superiors come into this scene as facilitators both of individual growth and of the common goal of the group and can be drawn upon by the individual to foster her own understanding of God and God's purposes. As such it is sensible for us to take the role of superior as a genuine expression of basic ministry and to avail ourselves of it. This, though, is the voluntary seeking of a companion's advice not the active imposition of views upon the passive individual. When we work this out in practice in an appropriate way, then we shall enter into the mystery of Christ's obedience where free will, informed choice and the willed acceptance of the Father's plans all come together.

ENCOURAGEMENT ON THE JOURNEY: AN EXPERIENCE OF GOVERNMENT

Sally Cassidy SHCJ

FOR me government certainly includes personal discernment as to the action of God in my daily life. I must listen to the Lord — be obedient to God's call. Not so easy. God is full of surprises it seems to me. God's revelation requires my undivided attention! I have discovered myself walking along this journey 'with the Lord', only to discover that I left God some miles back. I got so caught up in something VERY important! This discovery never fails to surprise me. 'I did it again! No, not me. Ah, yes, Again,' the self-dialogue goes. I am learning to be more tolerant of my failings. Sometimes I can look at myself and smile gently rather than glare disapprovingly. One of God's gifts.

But to participate in government is so much more than reflecting prayerfully on my personal response to God. I also have the task of joining with each member of the Society in trying to understand God's plan for us as we move into the twenty-first century. I can help shape our future and our effectiveness. It is an encouraging thought. I like the idea of being relied upon as well as depending upon others in the Society to discern together God's call for us.

It is a thought which lifts my spirits and I have been noticing how this feeling is in sharp contrast to those I experience as a citizen participating in a national election. As the latter participant, I wonder if my efforts make much difference. I am tempted to surrender to attitudes of apathy and cynicism regarding my right and responsibility to vote. So why does the idea of participating in SHCJ government have such a different effect upon me? Why does it raise my hopes? Perhaps the difference centres upon that belief that we cherish.

In describing SHCJ education we speak of a system which has as its basis the trust and reverence for the dignity of each person. This value not only underpins our educational system, it is also the dynamic out of which we act. Each of us is different — unique. Each of us is valuable — to be valued. I believe government works because of this shared view.

I feel proud to be an SHCJ. It has been my experience to have been treated well — affirmed. I believe my input has been and will be taken seriously — that the hearer will have an attentive heart. Please, I don't mean to sound naive. Certainly I have had my moments of intolerance and hard-heartedness. Others have been hurt. I, too, have experienced hostility. But generally that value that we cherish holds us together well.

Besides operating out of this understanding of each person which Cornelia held, I think another trait helps government in the Society to work. Cornelia